



United States Mission to the OSCE

Session 7: Tolerance and Non-Discrimination II

Implementation of the OSCE Action Plan on Roma and Sinti National Minorities Preventing aggressive nationalism, racism and chauvinism

As prepared for delivery by Erika Schlager
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As the 1991 Moscow Document stated, human rights are the direct and legitimate concern of all participating States. That is particularly true when we examine this morning's subject.

In April of this year, Secretary of State Clinton said, "Protecting and promoting the human rights of Roma everywhere has long been a personal commitment for me, and under the Obama Administration it is a priority of the United States."

Roma have come to the United States since the colonial period, and they have been part of every wave of European migration since then. They have come seeking jobs and opportunities, religious freedom, and refuge from war and conflict. They are part of the fabric of my country. Unfortunately, Romani people in the United States also face prejudice and discrimination, as they do elsewhere in the OSCE region. But it is the job of our governments to combat prejudice, marginalization and exclusion of all persons, including Roma – not foster it.

In March, the Government of Turkey convened an unprecedented and historic gathering of more than 10,000 Roma to discuss housing, access to education and other issues. We welcome the Turkish cabinet's meeting with Roma, and the opportunity it presents for meaningful initiatives.

Despite progress over the past decade, many of Europe's millions of Roma still live on the margins of society, and continue to experience violence and discrimination. Too often, they lack identity documents or citizenship papers, which effectively excludes them from voting, social services, education, and employment. We are hopeful that recent debates will also create an opportunity to focus collective attention on the need for continued, practical progress. We are concerned by comments by officials in some European states implying Roma by nature have criminal traits. The de jure or de facto segregation of Romani school children – such segregated schools exist in Slovakia, Croatia, Bulgaria and elsewhere – is also an obstacle to progress and to

allowing all children to reach their full potential. In recent weeks, there has been vigorous public debate about the situation of Roma living in France following the French government's action to close unauthorized camps and the transfer of hundreds of Romani EU citizens back to countries of origin. Similar debates continue in other European countries. Nonetheless, we are heartened by the strong commitment, which we have heard from numerous NGOs and governments, here in Warsaw, Hungary, Slovakia, and all over Europe, to work cooperatively on behalf of the Roma for a better future.

Protecting and promoting the human rights of all persons, including the Roma, is a priority of the United States, as Secretary Clinton has said repeatedly. We strongly welcome increased European-level engagement in the plight of Roma, and commend the recent involvement of the European Union, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Council of Europe, and the European Court of Human Rights. Activities have included the European Roma Summit in Cordoba, the comprehensive reports of the OSCE Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues, and a series of ECHR decisions reinforcing equal rights of Roma throughout Europe. We commend the ODIHR's efforts to focus on early childhood education. We welcome the Council of Europe's plan to convene European leaders to discuss Roma concerns later this month. We recall that OSCE participating States have, in their national capacity, clear obligations to protect human rights.

The United States has committed a variety of tools to this cause, including development assistance and international visitor exchange programs. For example, our Roma education program in Macedonia provides preschool education for 250 children each year and has provided tutoring and out-of-school support to 1,500 primary school students. Following a series of unsolved killings of Roma in Hungary last year, local authorities asked the United States to send F.B.I. profilers to assist in the investigation, and local police subsequently arrested four persons in the case. In August, the State Department supported a new initiative to expand access to legal services for Roma in Romania, Bulgaria, Serbia and Macedonia. We will continue to work with our partners in government and civil society to help make universal respect for the human rights of Roma the norm across Europe.

Our commemoration of the 35th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act and the 20th anniversary of the Copenhagen Document would be empty, self-serving celebrations if not balanced by the acknowledgement of the 15th anniversary of the single greatest violation of Helsinki's principles and provisions ever to occur: the genocide at Srebrenica in war-torn Bosnia-Herzegovina. Ever since, the OSCE has increased its focus on and resources to the Western Balkans, including deployment of field missions. While significant progress has been achieved in the region during the last decade, the job is not yet complete. Two individuals indicted for war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide remain at-large, denying thousands of survivors the ability to put the past behind them.

The situation of the Serb and minority communities in Kosovo remains a focus of attention for the United States, as are the challenges of consolidating democratic development and rule-of-law in that country. U.S. Delegations to Human Dimension Implementation Meetings have consistently raised where we see shortcomings in the protection of human rights

in Kosovo, regardless of the ethnicity of the communities affected. And we will continue to do so. This points, however, to the notable and unfortunate absence of representatives of Kosovo at the table as a participating State in this pan-European organization. It is in the interest of all the communities of Kosovo and indeed all participating states here today that Kosovo, like all other countries of the region already OSCE members, have a seat at this table to answer to issues and events within its borders as measured against OSCE commitments. Being an OSCE state is supposed to be more a means than an end. How many participating States here today joined the OSCE while their democratic institutions were in their infancy and whose development benefited from being accorded the accountability and respect that comes with OSCE membership? The opportunity to move forward in strengthening human rights and freedoms for all of Kosovo's people should no longer be sidelined by those that would seek to reopen definitively resolved questions of Kosovo's status.

The United States welcomes the positive pronouncements issued by the Government of Turkey concerning that country's Kurdish population and urges Ankara to undertake concrete measures to improve the situation of Kurds and other ethnic minorities in its territory. The United States congratulates Greece on its new laws opening up acquisition of citizenship for long-term residents and giving resident non-citizens the ability to run for local public office and vote in regional and municipal elections. We encourage Greece to build on its OSCE commitments, including the ability of individuals to identify their nationality without disadvantage.

Finally, moderator, I would like to address the credible reports coming from Kyrgyzstan that ethnic Uzbeks in some southern areas are being targeted and arrested arbitrarily, sometimes with the aim of extorting money from their families. Once in custody, they are denied access to counsel and there are reports of torture and even death. Attorneys and human rights activists who assist them often face pressure and threats of arrest from the authorities. These reports underscore how much still needs to be done to protect minorities in that country and the need for the participating States to remain attentive to these human rights issues outside of the Vienna Ringstrasse, even as efforts to prepare for a summit intensify.